

VZCZCXRO3346
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2446 2180745
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 050745Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8679
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002446

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: WASIT SADRIST: THERE IS NO MORE JAM

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) "The character of the GOI justifies Sadrism resistance," claimed Sadrism Provincial Council (PC) Member Ahmed Ebrah in a July 29 meeting with Senior Advisor Gordon Gray and PRT members. However, Ebrah claimed that Sadr's June 13 statement was tantamount to a dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and that Sadr's stated intention to form a new group to fight Coalition Forces was "just words spoken under Iranian pressure." Ebrah confirmed that Sadrists would participate in the provincial elections as independent candidates or as part of other lists and said U.S. pressure was needed to pass the elections law. He said he understood the potential benefits of developing a relationship between the U.S. and national Sadrism leadership but emphasized that such meetings would need explicit authorization from Sadr. End summary.

JAM is gone, no special group

2. (C) "The character of the GOI justifies Sadrism resistance," claimed Ebrah. However, he said that following Sadr's June 13 statement, "there is no more Jaysh al-Mahdi." Ebrah added that the Sadrists realized most JAM members lacked military experience and claimed that "We don't use arms, even to defend ourselves." Sadr's June statement also discussed the creation of a group "pointed...at the occupier alone." Asked about the existence of this group, Ebrah laughed and said "Where is it? I went to Najaf and asked this question to Salah al-Obeidi. He said it was just words spoken under Iranian pressure." Ebrah emphasized the importance of following Arab, as opposed to Persian, marja'iyah, accusing Iranians of reading Arabic improperly and distorting the meaning of the Qu'ran. Asked about connections between Lebanese and Iraqi Shi'a, Ebrah said that each group followed its own religious leaders and any ties that existed were informal in nature.

Sadrism participation in elections

3. (C) According to Ebrah, Sadrists support open lists, reject the use of religious symbols in the elections, and hope to field technocratic candidates. Ebrah added that although Sadr forbade the Sadr Trend from participating in elections, he had allowed individual members to participate, and that many Sadrists were running as part of the Fadilah party. He said that until now he had not decided whether and how he would personally participate in the elections. Ebrah predicted that Wasit's tribes will each run two to three candidates, but dismissed all of Wasit's new and independent parties and candidates as "powerless; not one of them is well-known or has a decent chance." Ebrah said that U.S. intervention was needed to pass the election law, and accused President Jalal Talabani of acting according to "special interests." "Where do they think they are going to take Kirkuk?" he asked, "It will always be part of Iraq."

Message to U.S.

14. (C) Asked if he had a message for U.S. officials, Ebrah said "Give us space and don't back us into a corner." He claimed he understood the potential benefits of a relationship between the U.S. and the Sadrist Trend, but that developing national-level contacts would require explicit authorization from Sadr. "It needs more time," he said. He expressed concern over Iranian influence in southern Iraq and called the U.S. an 'obstacle' to the Iranian government. "Without the U.S.," he warned, Iran would destroy the Sadrist Trend in Wasit."

Comment

15. (C) Comment: The most recent meeting with Ebrah highlights the limits of southern U.S. engagement with Sadrists: while provincial political leaders are increasingly willing to meet, as of yet these engagements have failed to produce actionable intelligence on Jaysh al-Mahdi noncompliant special groups; increased engagement with national Sadrist leadership; or a noticeable change in Sadr's rhetoric against the 'occupation.' Ebrah's claim that Sadr's June 13 statement was tantamount to a dissolution of JAM has been echoed by other Sadrist contacts, including Maysan Governor Maliki. End comment.
CROCKER